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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER MCAP MOPS IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

REF: A. BEIRUT 687

1B. BEIRUT 644

1C. BEIRUT 634

1D. BEIRUT 570

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) General Petraeus, Embassy Beirut welcomes your visit which comes three weeks after Lebanon's June 7 parliamentary elections. Saad Hariri's March 14 coalition retained the parliamentary majority by an unexpected margin, and has a 71-57 edge over the opposition in the new parliament. The government headed by PM Fouad Siniora went into a caretaker status on June 21. With the formation of a new government pending, your visit provides an excellent opportunity to reinforce the message of strong U.S. support for Lebanon and the U.S.-Lebanese military relationship. During your visit, you will meet with President Michel Sleiman, caretaker Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, March 14 majority leader and presumptive next PM Saad Hariri, caretaker Defense Minister Elias Murr and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Jean Kahwagi.

12. (C) The formation of a new March 14-led government led by Saad Hariri is likely to be a protracted process if the opposition insists on maintaining "blocking third" veto powers in the cabinet. There is speculation that the opposition might relent on the blocking third, however, if Hizballah is offered assurances that discussion of Hizballah's weapons will be moved to the National Dialogue forum. Little progress has been made in the implementation of relevant UNSCRs which call for the demarcation of the Lebanon-Syria border and call for an end to weapons smuggling, although caretaker PM Siniora has promised to highlight to the new PM and his government the ongoing work in developing a Common Border Study and Common Border Force. Meanwhile, UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) continues to play an important role in maintaining calm in its area of operations between the Litani River south to the Israeli border. End Summary.

13. (C) KEY MESSAGES

(SBU) Your visit provides an excellent opportunity to deliver several key messages, as follows:

--Confirm the strength of the U.S.-Lebanese military relationship and U.S. plans to continue providing support to strengthen state institutions and state authority throughout Lebanon.

--Urge the new government to work towards the full implementation of UNSCRs 1559, 1680 and 1701, including the disarmament of all militias.

--Emphasize the U.S. view that a stable, secure Lebanon with strong state institutions will counter interference from Syria and Iran.

--Address positively the U.S. military assistance funding and delivery timeframes, explaining that quickly front loading the delivery pipeline will not serve the LAF well without the concomitant training and service support.

--Emphasize the inherent strengths of the U.S. assistance program over competing donor offers by noting the U.S. offers the complete package of political support and service and training components.

**MIL-ASSISTANCE:
EXPECTATIONS, EXPANSION & EQUIPMENT**

4 (C) The U.S has provided Lebanon nearly \$500 million in
BEIRUT 00000702 002 OF 004

military assistance since early 2005. Vice President Biden visited Lebanon May 22 and, in a speech to the leadership of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), made clear that the United States was committed to meeting the Lebanese Armed Force's needs. The recently announced \$69 million supplementary FY 2009 Foreign Military Financing (FMF) package for Lebanon was highlighted in the Lebanese press as evidence of U.S. continued commitment to Lebanon. Additionally, there are commitments in FY 2010 of about \$150 million in FMF. Your visit can reinforce the message that our commitment to the LAF and Lebanon's stability and sovereignty remains strong.

15. (C) The electoral victory by the pro-Western March 14 coalition has raised expectations in the GOL and LAF that we will provide more security assistance and deliver it faster than before. Presumptive PM Saad Hariri recently advocated with the Ambassador for more assistance in a style similar to a "Marshall Plan" that would include attack helicopters (Ref B). Hariri also has said he realizes we cannot provide some items because of QME concerns but asked that we allow Lebanon to seek those elsewhere. Caretaker Minister of Defense Elias Murr, who we believe will stay on in the new government, has advised Hariri against that, emphasizing the political backing that comes with U.S. assistance and the service and training aspects of the current U.S.- Lebanese military relationship (Ref A).

16. (C) The October 2008 Joint Military Commission (JMC) was the opening opportunity for U.S.-Lebanese military collaboration on strategic planning matters. The next JMC, scheduled for this fall, should provide another occasion to define and refine long-term scenarios. During your visit you will hear requests for more U.S. assistance to the LAF. While underscoring our commitment, you should encourage LAF efforts to continue to develop its military doctrine and refine its five-year strategic planning scenarios, which would help them make more clearly defined security assistance requests to us.

17. (C) Implementing a more vigorous U.S.-Lebanese military relationship will require an expansion of our Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) off the embassy compound. The LAF

has identified a site, but it requires force protection upgrades and DOD funding to execute those have not been approved.

8 (C) You may hear from General Kahwagi or others in the LAF leadership their apprehension about a planned second tranche of 46 M60-A3 tanks because of dissatisfaction with the first 10 A-3s that arrived from Jordan in May. They may express the view that the LAF's more critical equipment needs are for close air support, and special forces units which address the most pressing security threat, armed bases outside the Palestinian camps and volatile Palestinian camps such as Ain al-Hilwe. LAF Commander Kahwagi often states his desire for "more fixed wing," aircraft as an necessary component to fight those security threats. In fact, Kahwagi once remarked to us "better one plane than 500 tanks."

¶9. (C) With one Hellfire-equipped Cessna Caravan already in the LAF inventory, the original FY 09 supplement provided for two additional Caravan, but given that the supplemental was cut to \$69 million, ODC believes it is now necessary to reconsider the additional Caravan option and actively pursue a potentially much better deal using OV-10s.

¶10. (C) In addition to A-3 tanks and the Caravan, our equipment assistance delivery pipeline in 2009 includes deliveries of 60 HMMWVs, 8 RHIB boats, 170 M-203 grenade launchers, 1200 Datron secure radios and 825 helmets and body armor sets. During Vice President Biden's May 22 visit, he noted at an outdoor static display other equipment deliveries by the U.S. to the Lebanese; M88A1 tank recovery vehicle, zodiac boats, fire trucks, M249 SAW MGs, M198 Artillery pieces, demining equipment, 2.5 ton trucks, medical HMMWVs, and UH-1 Helicopters. The LAF has displayed great diligence and professionalism in maintaining the equipment, and its record of accountability for equipment, weapons, and ammunition alike has been exceptional.

BEIRUT 00000702 003 OF 004

NEW GOVERNMENT FORMATION

¶11. (C) Although the results handed a clear victory to the pro-western/anti-Hizballah March 14 coalition, forming a government is the next hurdle. Cabinet formation negotiations begin after today's election of the parliamentary speaker and designation of a PM-designate charged with forming a government. Majority leader Saad Hariri intends to become Prime Minister, and likely will. His coalition had a challenging time during the campaign period keeping the March 14 infighting and disagreements out of public view. Although Hariri has a cadre of advisors for political matters, he does not have a team of strong advisors for policy matters such as foreign or military affairs. Hariri has maintained an anti-Syrian position and often requests enhanced U.S. military assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces to be used as a deterrent to Syria. Political observers believe Hariri will be forced to moderate his tone vis-a-vis Syria to become Prime Minister.

¶12. (C) Soon after the election, speculation arose on the likelihood the opposition would insist on retaining a "blocking third" veto capacity in the cabinet. The opposition gained veto powers with the blocking third in the last cabinet. Recent announcements by opposition figures, including Michel Aoun, reveal the opposition is considering demands for proportional representation in the cabinet based on election results. Any conciliatory actions made by Hizballah and its allies to the new majority in forming a cabinet would likely be conditioned on the assertion that discussion of disarming Hizballah is moved to future National Dialogue sessions.

UNIFIL

¶13. (C) Both Lebanon and Israel maintain their declared commitment to UNSCR 1701, which ended the 2006 Lebanon-Israel conflict, and continue to engage with the UN towards its implementation. Since your December visit, sporadic incidents and alleged UNSCR violations have been addressed promptly and contained through liaison arrangements UNIFIL maintains under the tripartite mechanism. There continues to be steady progress to mark the "Blue Line" between Lebanon and Israel. Despite some LAF re-deployments from the south (driven by operational needs in other parts of the country) the LAF has maintained its operational tempo in coordinated training and patrol activities with UNIFIL. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) still control the northern half of the village of Ghajar, but efforts to facilitate its full withdrawal from Lebanese territory continue through a UNIFIL proposal. The Lebanese complain regularly about Israeli overflight violations.

14 (C) The situation in the UNIFIL area of operation (AO) remains generally quiet. In January, during the crisis in Gaza, unknown persons launched Katyusha rockets at Israeli territory, which caused minor damage but no casualties. The rocket attacks launched from the UNIFIL AO demonstrate there are still weapons and hostile armed elements ready to use them. Subsequent joint LAF/UNIFIL search efforts after the launchings discovered abandoned bunkers, rocket caches, and other military infrastructure. However, UNIFIL stated in its June 4 update to the UNSC on the implementation of 1701 that, to date, it has neither been provided with, nor found, any evidence of new military infrastructure or smuggling of arms into its AO. UNIFIL's mandate expires August 31, but with another one year extension expected, there is no indication of any planned reductions in its operating mandate or force structure.

¶15. (C) UNIFIL carries out over 10,000 patrols monthly and has continued to exercise full freedom of movement, in general, throughout the AO. The attitude of the local population towards UNIFIL continues to be generally positive. Additionally, work has commenced on building a road parallel to the "Blue Line" with which the LAF and UNIFIL can patrol more effectively and rapidly the Lebanese side of the border. In an effort to create a legacy environment of good

BEIRUT 00000702 004 OF 004

community relations in the south, UNIFIL has taken on the mission of training the LAF in a LAF initiated civil-military (CIMIC) community outreach program intended to positively link the military units stationed in the south with community leaders.

UNSCR 1701

¶16. (C) President Sleiman supports full implementation of UNSCR 1701 and has said he would insist on including a reference to it in the next government's policy statement (Ref D). However, Israel is officially considered by Lebanon to be "the enemy." Although UNSCR 1701 outlines requirements for a Lebanese-Israeli cease-fire, pending a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, GOL interlocutors argue that continued Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar village and Shebaa Farms and regular Israeli overflights of Lebanon impinge on Lebanese sovereignty and territory. In a more positive development, Israel handed over in May cluster bomb strike data from the 2006 war to UNIFIL and the Lebanese demining authorities. In an interview aired June 10 on CNN, Saad Hariri reaffirmed the GOL position that Lebanon would be the last country in the region to sign a peace deal with Israel.

¶17. (C) Special Envoy for Middle East Peace Senator George Mitchell's June 12 visit was well received in Lebanon. He met with President Michel Sleiman, PM Siniora, March 14 majority leader Saad Hariri, and opposition-aligned Foreign Minister Fawzi Salloukh. S/E Mitchell emphasized the United

States' strong support for full implementation of UNSCR 1701.

Remarking that there had been "too much process and not enough peace," S/E Mitchell noted the United States was committed to comprehensive peace in the region, but not at the expense of Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. Sleiman confirmed Lebanon was ready to participate in an international conference but not in direct talks with Israel.

Siniora stressed that any solution cannot involve permanent resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. For his part, Saad Hariri expressed willingness to work alongside the United States in its efforts towards peace and asked for U.S. assistance in pushing Syria to stop the weapons flow into Lebanon. Regarding the current stage of talks, S/E Mitchell said the United States is looking for Arab gestures to be made simultaneously with Israeli steps, which together could create a climate conducive for final status negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

¶18. (C) Lebanon and Syria formally established diplomatic relations in October 2008. The two sides exchanged ambassadors in the spring of 2009. Aside from these modest steps at normalized relations, Lebanon and Syria have yet to tackle the myriad bilateral agreements signed during Syrian occupation. Borders between the two countries remain porous but the GOL and the SARG have engaged in modest cooperation to add more patrols to certain sections of the border. Efforts on the implementation of relevant UNSCRs which call for the delineation of the Lebanon-Syria border, an end to weapons smuggling, and the disarmament of armed groups in Lebanon, are admittedly weak. The SARG denies, and the GOL claims not to have evidence, of weapons smuggling from Syria into Lebanon. However, on the last full day of his government's mandate, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora reaffirmed the ongoing commitment of Lebanon to extend the model of the Common Border Force to the eastern border, starting with the first 70 kilometers in northeast Lebanon. Confirming the status of scores of missing or detained Lebanese in Syria has been an issue undertaken by the Lebanese-Syrian Higher Council. In a goodwill gesture, Syria recently released 23 Lebanese detainees, saying most were released with "special amnesty."

SISON